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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

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SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE JANUARY 9, 2009, 1300 LOCAL

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11. (SBU) Summary. Following the passage of a UNSCR calling for a cease-fire, the IDF maintained its positions on January 9 and continued operations in northern Gaza and around Khan Yunis, generally on the outskirts of urban areas. IAF and Israeli naval strikes targeted northern Gaza and some areas in central Gaza overnight. A humanitarian pause began at 1200 local. The suspension of movement inside Gaza UNRWA and ICRC continues. Kerem Shalom is open, but only for deliveries organized by the private sector. UN OCHA reported 776 dead and 3,100 wounded since hostilities broke out. A total of ten Israeli soldiers have died in action to date. The PA Cabinet expressed support for the Egyptian initiative to end hostilities. Press reported that HAMAS rejected the UNSC-endorsed cease-fire. End summary.

Ground Operation Continues,
Focus in Northern Gaza

12. (SBU) Gaza-based sources, local press, and NGOs report that the IDF continued operations January 8-9 in the northern Gaza Strip, around Gaza City, Bayt Lahiya, Bayt Hanun, and Jabaliya, as well as around Khan Yunis. The IDF maintained positions from Nahal Oz to the coast, cutting northern Gaza off from the rest of the Strip; east of the defunct Rafah airport; and northeast of al-Burayj refugee camp.

13. (SBU) According to Gaza-based contacts and local press, the heaviest fighting January 8-9 took place in northern Gaza, where IDF troops engaged militants near Bayt Hanun, Bayt Lahiya, Jabaliya, and on the outskirts of Gaza City. Clashes were also reported in Dayr al-Balah, and on the outskirts of the southern city of Khan Yunis.

-- Gaza-based contacts reported intense fighting in the eastern Gaza City neighborhoods of al-Tufah and al-Zaytun;

-- Israeli press reported that the Golani Infantry Brigade clashed with HAMAS militants in the northern Gaza Strip;

-- the Kfir Infantry Brigade came under attack in the area of the former Netzarim settlement January 7, where the IDF reported the first use of an anti-tank missile by HAMAS;

-- the Paratroopers Brigade was reported operating around the northern Gaza town of al-Atatra;

-- clashes reportedly took place in Abasan, al-Qarara, and Khan Yunis early on January 9, as the IDF continued to move around Khan Yunis.

[Note: Post is now reporting IDF unit-level activity as best we can for Leahy Act purposes. End note.]

Airstrikes and Naval Barrage Continue

¶4. (SBU) Gaza-based sources, local press, and the UN reported that the IAF and Israeli Navy struck at least 30 targets January 8-9, hitting offices, police stations, and homes. Most of the targets were in and around Gaza City, with other strikes in the central Gaza cities of Nusayrat and Shaykh al-Maghazi. At least ten militants were killed. The IAF also dropped leaflets over Rafah and Jabaliya, warning residents to leave the area in advance of military operations.

Rocket Fire Causes Four Injuries

¶5. (SBU) Israeli media reported at least seven rockets fired into Israel from Gaza before 1300 local on January 9. At least four of the rockets were Grad-type rockets, and struck fields near Beer Sheva. Four injuries were reported after a mortar landed within the Eshkol Regional Council limits. Reports said a total of 25 rockets were fired from Gaza on January 8.

Casualties

¶6. (SBU) UN OCHA reported that at least 758 Palestinians have been killed since hostilities began through January 9, including 257 children, 56 women, and 12 paramedics. Of the reported 3,100 injured, 1,080 are children and 452 are women. The ICRC reported that 683 bodies have been transported to hospitals it supports in Gaza, and, of the 3,070 wounded being treated in those hospitals, one-third are women and children. Gaza-based health officials reported to press that 776 have died thus far. The UN reported that the danger to medical staff and the difficulty of extracting the

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injured from collapsed buildings makes proper evacuation and estimation of casualties difficult.

¶7. (SBU) Israeli media reported three soldiers killed in action on January 8, bringing the total Israeli military casualties to ten dead and 107 wounded since hostilities began.

Humanitarian Situation

¶8. (SBU) A humanitarian pause began January 9 at noon, expected to last through 1500 local. Kerem Shalom is opened, but because UNRWA and the ICRC have suspended their movements in Gaza, the crossing is expected to handle only private sector trucks.

Political Developments

¶9. (SBU) The PA Cabinet released a statement on 8 January calling for an end to hostilities. The statement also offered support to President Mubarak's cease-fire initiative. The PA also called on Israel to ensure the availability of food, water, and medical supplies to the residents of Gaza.

¶10. (SBU) Israeli press reported that statements by HAMAS leaders in Syria and Lebanon indicated that the faction is unwilling to accept the UNSC call for a cease-fire.

West Bank Reactions and Security

¶11. (SBU) Demonstrations are being held in towns throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem on January 9. HAMAS called on West Bank residents to demonstrate after Friday prayers, declaring January 9 a "day of rage." PASF officials declared a special state of alert and reported that they would work to keep demonstrations peaceful and prevent clashes with the IDF.

-- Thousands of Israeli police deployed around Jerusalem early on the morning of January 9 to ensure calm during Friday prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque. The GoI prevented males over the age of 50 from entering the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount compound;

-- two Palestinians throwing Molotov cocktails near Hebron were injured by rubber bullets when the IDF fired on them; and

-- dozens of women and children suffered from teargas inhalation while protesting at the separation barrier near the town of Bil'in.

WALLES